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The (Un)Attractiveness of Vocational and Technical Education: Theoretical Background

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This paper considers the problem of the lack of attractiveness of vocational and technical education via a review of legislation on counselling practices, implementing documents, and the social factors by means of which the education system can influence the individual's decision. It is apparent that legislation regulating the organisation and content of career counselling services in educational sector is inadequate. The organisation of career counselling at the level of implementation is also inadequate. Counsellors advise individuals on the basis of their academic results and the results of aptitude tests. Counselling practices deriving from theories that place career planning and management skills in the foreground are more rarely represented. Theories that treat career decisions as a social process show that at the level of the student population the choice of the type of school is a rational decision based primarily on the economic position and level of education to which a specific educational pathway is generally supposed to lead. The lower attractiveness of vocational and technical education coincides with the fact that representatives of lower social classes have a weaker economic position and more frequently have vocational and technical education qualifications than representatives of higher social classes. Nevertheless, the trend of high unemployment among young people with academic qualifications, which opposite of the traditional situation, indicates that it will be necessary to include career planning and management skills in the educational contents of institutionalised and formal education as a whole.

Keywords: Vocational and technical education, Gimnazije, Career choice, Information and counselling, Lifelong career guidance

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Nekateri vzroki za nizko privlačnost poklicnega in strokovnega izobraževanja

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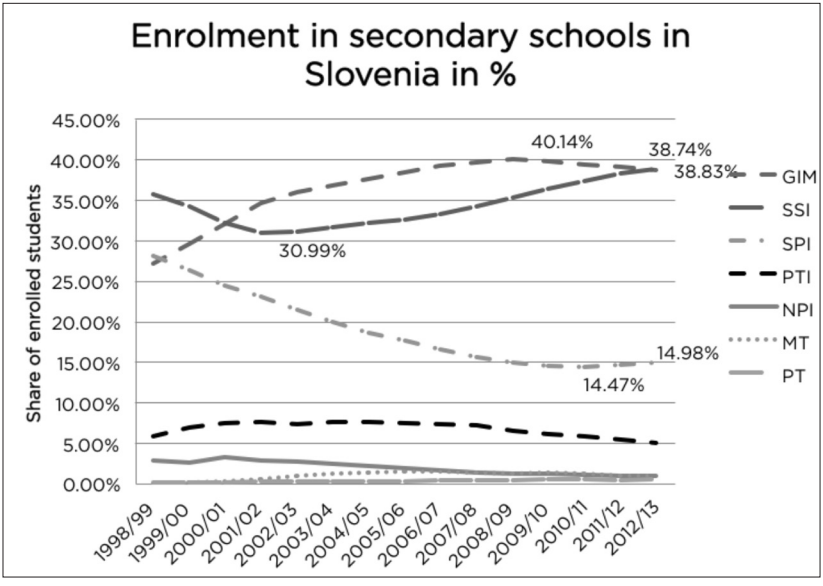
Problem nizke privlačnosti poklicnega in strokovnega izobraževanja obravnavamo ob pregledu svetovalnih praks, zakonodaje, izvedbenih dokumentov in družbenih dejavnikov, prek katerih lahko šolski sistem vpliva na posameznikovo odločitev. Izkaže se, da je zakonodaja, ki ureja organizacijo in vsebino kariernega svetovanja, na področju izobraževanja pomanjkljiva. Prav tako je pomanjkljiva tudi urejenost področja kariernega svetovanja na izvedbeni ravni. Svetovalci posameznikom svetujejo na podlagi njihovih učnih rezultatov in rezultatov testov sposobnosti. Svetovalne prakse, ki izhajajo iz teorij, ki v ospredje postavljajo veščine načrtovanja in vodenja kariere, so redko zastopane. Teorije, ki karierno odločitev obravnavajo kot družbeni proces, pokažejo, da je izbira vrste šolanja na ravni populacije racionalna odločitev, ki temelji predvsem na ekonomskem položaju in stopnji izobrazbe, do katere naj bi posamezna izobraževalna pot navadno peljala. Nižja privlačnost poklicnega in strokovnega izobraževanja sovpada s tem, da imajo predstavniki nižjih družbenih razredov slabši ekonomski položaj ter pogosteje poklicno in strokovno izobrazbo kot predstavniki višjega družbenega razreda. Vendar pa trend visoke brezposelnosti mladih z akademsko kvalifikacijo, ki je tradicionalno pomenil nasprotje pravkar povedanega, nakazuje, da bo treba v izobraževalne vsebine celotnega institucionaliziranega in formaliziranega izobraževanja vključiti veščine načrtovanja in vodenja kariere.

Ključne besede: poklicno in strokovno izobraževanje, gimnazija, karierna odločitev, informiranje in svetovanje, vseživljenjska karierna orientacija

The imbalance between supply and demand in the labour market

For years, the European Commission has been saying that there is a shortage of workers with vocational and technical education in EU countries. In more than half of EU member states, a constant downwards trend in enrolment in secondary vocational and technical education programmes can be observed. Slovenia is among the countries where enrolment in such programmes is constantly falling (Eurostat, 2012). Particularly striking is the constant fall in enrolment in secondary vocational education programmes, which has fallen from 28.15% of the total school population (1998/99 academic year) to just 14.47% (2010/11 academic year). Up to the 2001/02 academic year, enrolment in secondary technical education programmes also fell, mainly on account of the growth in enrolment in *gimnazija programmes*[2]. This trend reversed in the 2002/03 academic year, largely due to the continuation in the fall in enrolment in secondary vocational education programmes (Graph 1).



Abbreviations: GIM – gimnazija, SSI – secondary technical education, SPI – secondary vocational education, PTI – vocational-technical education, NPI – lower vocational education, MT – matura course, PT – vocational course.
Source: Šol-S(M) Začetek: Centralne obdelave, 2012.

Graph 1. Trends in secondary school enrolments 1998/99–2010/11.

2 Term the gimnazija programmes stands for general secondary educational programs. Regular enrolment in *gimanzija programme* takes four years and finishes with national final exam called matura.The main goal of *gimanzija programmes* is to prepare students for tertiary education.

It is necessary to emphasise here that the rate of transition of students from secondary vocational education to further vocational-technical education is more than 75%. More than 90% of students in secondary technical education go on to tertiary education, while this figure is almost 100% for students in general secondary education (Krek & Metljak, 2011).

However, the percentage of unemployed young people with vocational education stands at 18.1%, while those with secondary technical or general education (secondary technical school and gimnazija) account for 33% (Strokovna izhodišča za leto 2013, 2012). The total share of unemployed young people with secondary education is therefore 52.1%.[3] Given the almost 100% transition of young people with a general education qualification to tertiary education, we can assume that the majority of these 52.1% of young unemployed people have secondary vocational or technical education.

Current conditions in the labour market in Slovenia are broadly comparable to those across the 27 countries of the EU. In 2010, 49.5% of employees in the EU had secondary education, compared to 58.29% in Slovenia. Employees with tertiary education accounted for 27.7% at the EU level and for 26.10% in Slovenia. The share of employees with primary or lower secondary education (equivalent to lower vocational education) was 22.9% at the EU level and 15.1% in Slovenia. EU-27 forecasts up to 2020 show that the demand for a workforce with secondary vocational and technical education, i.e. having completed education at the secondary level, will remain at a constant level of around 50%, or 55 million jobs. (Delovno aktivno prebivalstvo…, 2012; Skills Supply…, 2010; Skills needs in Europe…, 2008).

A comparison of figures for 2007 in 2012 shows that the share of unemployed young people with secondary education (secondary vocational school, secondary technical school and gimnazija) fell from 58.0% to 51.1%, while the share of unemployed young people with tertiary education increased from 13.1% to 19.5%. The share of unemployed young people with elementary education or less grew from 28.0 % to 29.3%. (Strokovna izhodišča za leto 2013, 2012.) Although this last figure is a cause for concern, it is especially the falling trend in the share of unemployed young people with secondary education and the simultaneous increase in the share of unemployed young people with tertiary education that are essential for our analysis. This trend may be understood as a consequence of the fact that the majority of the secondary school population continues education at the tertiary level.

3 Deviations from this finding are possible, since ESS figures do not indicate what population is actually included by the term 'young people'.

Unfortunately, the figure for the share of unemployed young people with secondary education does not allow us to distinguish unemployed gimnazija students from those who attended a vocational or technical school. On the basis of the European Commission's findings regarding the shortage of workers with vocational and technical education and the ESS's findings that there is already a shortage of domestic workers with, in particular, secondary vocational education (Strokovna izhodišča za leto 2013, 2012), we may conclude that an even greater imbalance between supply and demand for workers with secondary vocational and technical education is highly likely in the future.

Within the question of the imbalance of supply and demand regarding a workforce with vocational and technical education, we shall focus on the problem of the lack of interest among young people in this kind of education, and on the great interest of young people in tertiary education. We shall consider the problem via the activity of lifelong career guidance, the key objective of which is to help the individual make decisions about further educational and career options. In this sense, we shall look at how the field of lifelong career guidance is regulated in legislation, implementing documents and implementing practices in elementary schools.

Career guidance in legislation and its implementation in elementary schools

No uniform consensus has yet been arrived at in Slovenia with regard to the translation of the English term 'career guidance' and complementary terms such as 'educational and vocational guidance'. The concept of career guidance thus appears under a variety of names including (lifelong) career guidance, vocational guidance, careers advice, information and guidance counselling, counselling work in (adult) education, and orientation. In this article, we will use the term 'career guidance' as defined in the career guidance glossary published by the Employment Service of Slovenia (ESS): '[…] Services and activities that help individuals make decisions about education, training and career and enable them to manage their life paths in learning, work and other environments […]' (Kohont et al., 2011, p. 22).

The field of career guidance is covered in Slovenia by the Labour Market Regulation Act (UL RS 80/2010), the Organisation and Financing of Education Act (UL RS 16/2007), the Vocational Education and Training Act (UL RS 79/2006) and the Elementary Education Act (UL RS 81/06, 102/2007).

The Labour Market Regulation Act (ZUTD) deals with the field in considerable detail. Among other things, it stipulates that career guidance

counselling services are provided under this act as support for the career guidance programme of a school or faculty (ZUTD, 2010). The Organisation and Financing of Education Act (ZOFVI-UPB5) is rather less explicit, merely providing, in Article 67, that in the provision of career counselling, the school's counselling service should liaise with the ESS (ZOFVI-UPB5, 2007). As the umbrella law in the field of education, the ZOFVI-UPB5 applies to elementary schools, secondary vocational and technical schools and gimnazije. The Gimnazije Act (ZGim-UPB-1, 2007) does not mention career counselling, while acts covering other types of schools only mention it in remarkably general terms. Article 2 of the Elementary Education Act (ZOsn-UPB 3) provides that the objective of elementary education is to furnish students with the necessary skills for further educational and vocational development, with an emphasis on competences for lifelong learning (ZOsn-UPB 3, 2006). There is thus not even a direct mention of career counselling as a service, but merely of an objective, which is simultaneously the objective of career counselling. Career counselling is mentioned in the Vocational Educational and Training Act (ZPSI-1), but only in the part relating to cooperation between social partners and competent ministries with vocational and technical schools. Article 18 of the act provides that social partners and, in the case of regulated professions, the competent ministries should, in the exercise of their functions, cooperate with schools on vocational guidance, the planning of deployment of education programmes and enrolment levels, and the definition of the open curriculum (ZPSI-1, 2006). The two points that stand out when reviewing these laws is that career guidance is given adequate coverage in the ZUTD and that the cooperation of school counselling services with the ESS is required by the ZOFVI-UPB5.

Regarding how implementation is regulated, the business plan of the ESS in the field of career guidance highlights work with the unemployed and other jobseekers. Career guidance services for primary and secondary school students and their parents and for university students are only defined in the sense of support for school counselling services (Poslovni načrt za leto 2012…, 2012).

A key document regulating the work of the guidance counselling service at elementary schools in the field of career guidance is the Programme Guidelines of the Elementary School Counselling Service, prepared by the Curriculum Committee for Counselling Work and the Class Community. These guidelines define in detail the activities covered by career counselling services, stating, 'vocational guidance should include the following activities: careers information, diagnosis, careers advice, careers education, placement, representation, feedback and monitoring' (Čačinovič Vogrinčič et al., 1999, p. 24). However, they set a relatively modest standard regarding the amount of time to be dedicated to these activities (ibid.).

We can reach conclusions about the scope and content of the implementation of career guidance in schools on the basis of the analysis of the survey on the state of career guidance at elementary schools carried out among school counselling staff by the ESS. The analysis confirms that career guidance at elementary schools includes all four groups of activities called for by the guidelines, which have their basis in the annual plan of work of the ESS and in legislation. However, in accordance with the standards regarding the time defined in the guidelines, they are implemented in an extremely narrow context of activities, for which time is extremely limited. The analysis states that these activities are not part of the regular education programme. In this sense, it has become the practice to implement these activities during substitution periods, which means that they cannot be planned and performed systematically with regard to individual classes (Gabor et al., 2008).

Career guidance activities, which are carried out by more than 90% of the counselling staff who responded to the survey, often in conjunction with the ESS, are the following: individual talk with a school counsellor for parents, individual talk with a school counsellor for students, team talks (with fellow teachers), external testing in Year 9, testing with a multi-factor test battery (MFTB), careers guidebook, career questionnaire, lectures on choice of career and special career education lessons (ibid.). The analysis highlights the close connection of activities such as individual talks with a school counsellor for students and parents and MFTB testing and career questionnaires. The results of testing, in fact, represent one of the bases for these individual talks (ibid.).

We are able to draw more conclusions on the use of MFTB in the context of guidance with regard to further education on the basis of the Zois Scholarship Reports at the ESS. Although other tests (e.g. creativity tests and tests of intellectual ability) are also used for the awarding of Zois scholarships, we anticipate a connection between an individual's achievements in a MFTB and his or her success in applying for a Zois scholarship. The report shows that most secondary school students who win scholarships are enrolled in gimnazija programmes (83.3% of the total), after having achieved very good or excellent results in primary school in the majority of cases (Nagy, 2012). At the same time, we can conclude that these are students who on average were also more successful in MFTBs. The smallest number of gifted pupils are, by contrast, enrolled in secondary technical education programmes, while according to figures from the ESS, gifted students do not enrol in secondary vocational education programmes (ibid.).

Similar indications are provided by statistical data on the enrolment of Zois scholars in the first year of secondary schools, i.e. for the student population

for which selection procedures take place while they are still in elementary school. A review of the figures from 2008 to 2011 indicates a roughly constant percentage of Zois scholars enrolled in individual programmes. In 2011, for example, 97.35% of all successful Zois scholarship applicants were enrolled in the first year of gimnazija, 2.44% were enrolled in secondary technical education programmes, and 0.21% were enrolled in secondary vocational education programmes (Študenti in dijaki štipendisti po vrsti štipendije…, 2012). The correlation between the choice of school and academic results is also confirmed by the study Dejavniki šolske uspešnosti v poklicnem izobraževanju (Factors of Academic Success in Vocational Education). Gimnazija students achieved an average grade in elementary school of 4.63, compared to 3.43 for students of secondary technical schools and 2.75 for students of secondary vocational schools (Flere, 2008).

In view of the fact that in the process of reaching a decision on a student's further educational career guidance counsellors use MFTB results to provide individual guidance to students or their parents, and given that a connection exists between achievement in these tests, academic results and the selected type of education programme, we can state with considerable certainty that guidance counsellors influence the individual's choice of general education or vocational and technical education on the basis of MFTB results, and also on the basis of academic results. We may also assume with considerable certainty that parents advise their children with regard to their choice of further schooling on the same basis. As an example supporting this assumption, we cite the finding that parents also influence the (general) belief that enrolment in technical and vocational education is for those who are not capable of anything better (Sankovič et al., 2010).

On this basis, we may state with considerable certainty that while career counselling services are provided among the target population in Slovenia at the transition from elementary school to secondary school, this is done so in a rather reduced form in terms of both time and content. Counselling on the basis of aptitude tests is the prevailing activity. It has the effect of discouraging students from choosing vocational and technical education programmes. In a significant percentage of cases, vocational (careers) education[4] (which should

4 Careers education is defined in the Programme Guidelines of the Elementary School Counselling Service as '[…] one of the activities of vocational orientation [and] represents a programme of planned experiences with the help of which the student develops the concepts, knowledge and skills that enable him or her to make suitable decisions and help in transitions from one level of education to another and in the transition to employment. It is provided in the context of regular subject classes, the class community and other activities at the school (interest activities, afternoon lectures) and outside the school (school trips, visits to businesses and organisations, work experience, etc.)' (Čačinovič Vogrinčič et al., 1999, p. 24).

represent an integral part of career guidance) is also missing, owing to its absence from education programmes. In the sections that follow, we shall explore the theoretical concepts that are the basis for the above-described counselling practices in Slovenia.

Theoretical background of current counselling practices

Numerous views and theories on what influences career decision-making[5] in young people have emerged since the beginning of the twentieth century. According to Osipow, the three prevailing theories among guidance professionals are the following: trait and factor theory, developmental theory and social learning theory (Osipow, 1990). By examining all three of these theories, we shall aim to establish their influence on counselling practices in Slovenia.

The trait-and-factor theory understands the purpose of lifelong career guidance and the essence of career decision-making as the search for a connection between the individual and his or her placement.[6] The theory grew out of the needs of the industrial workforce market, which needed workers who were willing and able to perform specific types of tasks. A suitable connection between the individual's abilities and the requirements of a specific occupation, also guaranteed workforce stability, which was also significant for the efficient functioning of the industrial system of production. This connection was supposed to be established on the basis of identification of the individual's personality traits and the skills and interests necessary to perform a specific job. Various types of tests were developed for this purpose, among them the MFTB referred to earlier.

Developmental theory, which also prevails among lifelong career guidance professionals, asserts that different stages exist in the process of career decision-making, while the 'right' decision can only be taken when the individual develops his or her competences to a sufficient level and becomes sufficiently mature as a person (Lapajne, 1996). This theory is characterised by a connection between the individual's chronological age and the behaviour expected in connection with a professional career at a specific age. Authors differ in particular in terms of how precisely they define the stages of career development. Donald Super, for example, identifies a special category within the individual's development, which he calls 'vocational maturity'. In the same way that intellectual, emotional and physical development presumes intellectual, emotional and physical maturity, so too does career development presume differences between

5 Young people understand career decision-making above all in the sense of deciding on the choice of type and level of education. Career as a broader concept, however, suggests a connection with the wider context of the individual's educational and career path.

6 As used here, the term 'placement' refers to an actual placement in the labour market.

individuals in vocational maturity, according to Super. Two elements are involved here: (1) the position of the individual on the diagram of behavioural development, which ranges from the stage of exploration to the stage of decline and (2) the actual behaviour of the individual with respect to his or her chronological age. Super defines five factors of vocational maturity, where vocational maturity at the age of 15 only relates to two factors: orientation of the individual towards a choice of occupation, and information about and planning of career development and decisions. According to Super, Indications of vocational maturity in this period are: information about how to prepare for a future career; information about the material conditions of work in a future career; the level of practical preparation in the direction of the future career (Lapajne, 1996).

The theory of social learning, as the third prevailing theory among career guidance professionals, is based on behaviourism and on theories that understand the career decision as the result of the individual's social learning. An significant step forward was taken in the 1990s by Krumboltz, who shifts from the theory of career decision-making to the theory of career counselling. Like Super, Krumboltz begins with a critique of the trait and factor theory and claims that people should not base their decisions merely on existing characteristics but need to expand their capabilities and interests. He believes that such an approach is required because careers are no longer stable, which requires people to prepare for changing work tasks, in which, in addition to performing work tasks, they are also expected to market themselves within the context of their organisations. In this sense, the main task of counsellors is to encourage learning in those they advise: '[T]hey should not look on themselves as someone who matches workers to jobs, but rather as trainers, educators and mentors' (Lapajne, 1996, p. 50). Krumboltz's theory of social learning or career counselling manifests itself in numerous models of counselling practices, one of which, very familiar to counselling professionals, is the so-called DOTS model (decision-making, opportunity awareness, transitions, self-awareness). The model is based on the idea that through the counselling process, the counsellor prepares the individual in four areas: (1) getting to know oneself (identifying one's characteristics, interests, knowledge, capabilities and talents, etc.); (2) discovering opportunities for education, training, employment, learning about careers and the world of work in general; (3) decision-making (learning about types of decision-making and the factors that must be considered); (4) realisation of goals set (Law, 1996). The skills that individuals obtain through learning in all four of these areas are characterised as career planning and management skills.

A comparison of the counselling practices employed in elementary schools in Slovenia and the theoretical background from which these practices

derive shows that the influence of the trait and factor theory, which derives from the needs of industrial society, is still extremely powerful. We likewise detect the influence of the developmental theory, and in particular the concept of vocational maturity, which introduces the category of practical preparation in the direction of the future career, information about how to prepare for a specific career and information about the material conditions of work. Our observation is that these activities, in the final year of elementary school, can be understood above all as learning about different occupations, career opportunities within individual occupations, and the education programmes which are a condition for entering these occupations. Preparation for a specific occupation in this period does not yet mean, in fact, the acquisition of knowledge and skills to perform that specific occupation. The social learning theory is crucial, especially in the sense that it represents a leap in the understanding of the counsellor as not merely a passive 'facilitator' but as an active educator, trainer and teacher. This requires a new approach in the counselling process which includes vocational (career) education in school curricula. This, however, is poorly represented, not only in Slovenia but also in a number of other countries (Gabor et al., 2008; Karierna orientacija: priročnik za oblikovalce politike, 2006; Niklanovič, 2007).

Numerous meta-analyses have been carried out and research reports written in connection with the effectiveness of counselling practices based on trait and factor theory, developmental theory and social learning theory (Brown & Krane, 2000; Folsom & Reardon, 2003; Kidd & Killeen, 1992; Killeen, 1996; Oliver & Spokane, 1988; Spokane & Oliver, 1983; Whiston, 2002). The general finding of these analyses and reports is that counselling practices are generally effective regardless of the form in which they are implemented (ibid.). In the counselling activity described above, we have found that individual elements of the counselling process (identifying the individual's capabilities, academic success, information about the future career, learning about opportunities in education, training and employment, learning about occupations on the world of work in general) correspond with trends among elementary school students in Slovenia with regard to choosing (or not) a vocational and technical or general educational pathway.

As used here, the term 'placement' refers to an actual placement in the labour market. The question that needs to be asked, in the light of the above findings, is what else, besides counselling practices, affects this correspondence? We proceed from the assumption that the individual, as a social being, is subject to the influences of the environment. This also applies to deciding about further educational and vocational pathways. In this sense, we shall look at the decision of the individual from the point of view of society.

The individual's career decision-making as a social process

Sociological analyses of career decision-making are extremely rare. For the most part, they proceed from the assumption that the individual's life chances and career pathway are the result of actual decisions and/or social and structural determinants. This is also the basis on which Hodkinson and Sparkes build their model of career decision-making, which includes three key, interrelated components: (1) pragmatically rational decision-making; (2) interactions with others who have unequal resources within the education system; (3) the location of the decision within the partly unpredictable pattern of turning points and routines that make up the life course of the individual (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). In order to explain their model of career decision-making and these three components, the authors use the concept of habitus, defined as follows by Bourdieu: '[…] Habitus is the system of acquired dispositions [from the environment] functioning on the practical level as categories of perception and assessment or as classificatory principles as well as being the organising principles of action […]' (Bourdieu, 2003, p. 19). In this sense, the concept of habitus represents three pertinent facts, also taken into account in their model by Hodkinson and Sparkes: (1) the construction of the individual's categories of perception and assessment, which does not take place in a social vacuum but is subject to the structural limitations of the environment; (2) the individual's cognitive structure, which is in itself socially structured because it has a social origin; (3) the construction of social reality, which is not only a fact of the individual but can also become a collective fact (Bourdieu, 1989).

With their interpretation of career decision-making as a pragmatic and rational process that takes place in interaction with others and that is based on the partly unpredictable pattern of turning points and routines, Hodkinson and Sparkes offer an interpretation for understanding the background to career decision-making: '[…] Everything [the career decision-making process] takes place within a macro-context which has social, political, economic, cultural, geographic and historical dimensions […]' (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997, p. 41). Within this context, a game of interaction, measuring of strength, alliances and negotiations takes place among individual players in the process of social decision-making, where the rules of the game are determined by these interactions and by formal rules. Within this game, people make (at various turning points in their lives) pragmatic, rational decisions that are located in their horizon for action, i.e. in the arena within which it is possible for the individual to act and make decisions. The horizon for action referred to here derives from the

individual's cultural environment. Periods of routine take place before and after these turning points, where these routines are located within the game itself and in the macro context. Periods of routine and turning points are interconnected and, therefore, cannot be understood outside the whole. The transition from one turning point to another can be predictable and smooth or unpredictable and complex (ibid.).

The idea of the inequality of resources that influences the individual's career decision as a process that takes place in interaction with others is derived by Hodkinson and Sparkes from Bourdieu's concept of positions of power. According to Bourdieu, positions of power are reflected in the quantity of economic, cultural and social capital possessed by the individual, along with symbolic capital, which is the form the different types of capital take once they are perceived and recognised as legitimate (Bourdieu, 1989). The concept of cultural capital offers an explanation of why the level of education is one of the key elements in the process of career decision-making.

Bourdieu defines three states in which cultural capital exists: (1) the embodied state; (2) the objectified state; (3) the institutionalised state (Bourdieu, 1986). Institutionalised cultural capital has distinctive characteristics that distinguish it from embodied and objectified cultural capital. In this sense, an academic qualification, as one of the forms of institutionalised cultural capital, likewise has distinct characteristics. Obtaining an academic qualification is, in fact, one way of neutralising some of the properties that [cultural capital] derives from the fact that, being embodied, it has the same biological limits as its bearer. An academic qualification is a certificate of cultural competence that confers on its holder a conventional, constant, legally guaranteed value. It should be emphasised here that an academic qualification has a relative autonomy vis-à-vis its bearer and even vis-à-vis the cultural capital that the bearer already possesses. An academic qualification also makes it possible to compare qualification holders and even to substitute them. Furthermore, it makes it possible to establish conversion rates between cultural capital and economic capital by giving a monetary value to academic capital (ibid.). At the same time, Bourdieu points out that academic qualifications are a means of enriching cultural capital. An academic qualification is, in fact, a condition for legitimate access to a growing number of prominent positions in society (Bourdieu, 1986). In this way, Bourdieu explains the reason why an academic qualification is so desirable: it belongs to the individual and at the same time conditions legitimate access to powerful positions in society while enabling a conversion between economic and cultural capital.

The combination of academic qualification and economic status is also decisive for positioning in a specific social class or fraction within a particular

class. In the chapter entitled Distinction, dealing with the distribution of different classes and fractions within individual classes, Bourdieu shows by means of a diagram that a characteristic of the upper class is that it is well provided with economic and cultural capital. This coincides with a high rate of representation of economically well-situated and highly educated individuals. Lower social classes are by contrast characterised by poor provision with economic and cultural capital and a high rate of representation of individuals who are economically poorly situated and have a low level of education (Bourdieu, 2001).

In connection with the economic aspect of professions, the analysis shows that better salaries and therefore better economic status are achieved by those with higher education (Medveš, 2008). The study on factors of academic success in vocational education referred to earlier further highlights the fact that the population attending vocational and technical education programmes also has lower cultural capital than the population attending general or specialist gimnazije (Flere, 2008). In this sense, we may conclude that the representatives of lower social classes more frequently have vocational and technical education than representatives of higher social classes.

However, recent changes in the labour market, and also in education, point to a possible redefinition of the role of academic qualifications. Employment data from 2010 show that the unemployment rate among economically active young people aged 25–29 with a tertiary education qualification has grown from 3.8% in 2000 to 13.9%, while among the same population with secondary education unemployment has grown from 9.0% to just 14.8% (Lavrič, 2010). The convertibility of an academic qualification in the labour market has thus come remarkably close to the convertibility of a secondary school qualification.

At the same time, trends of enrolment in education are changing, although slightly. The proportion of students enrolled in gimnazije has been falling since the 2008/09 academic year; by the 2012/13 academic year, it had fallen from 40.14% to 38.74% of the overall secondary school population. The proportion of students enrolled in secondary vocational education has been growing since the 2009/10 academic year, rising from 14.53% to 14.98% of the overall secondary school population in the 2012/13 academic year. Although enrolment in secondary technical education has been growing since 2002/03, in the 2012/13 academic year it exceeded the proportion of enrolments in gimnazije for the first time in 12 years (Graph 1). As can be seen from Table 1, there is also a clear drop in the number of gimnazija programmes with enrolment restrictions in the 2012/13 academic year. Meanwhile, the number of secondary vocational and technical education programmes with enrolment restrictions has remained relatively constant.

Table 1. *Number of secondary schools with restrictions on enrolment by years by type of education Restrictions on enrolment in gimnazije by points for individual academic years in 2008/09–2012/13.*

	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
number of schools with restrictions – SPI/SSI	28	24	31	36	34
number of schools with restrictions – GIM	31	33	27	27	13

Abbreviations: SPI – secondary vocational education programmes, SSI – secondary technical education programmes, GIM – *gimnazija* programmes, classical *gimnazija*, sports *gimnazija*, technical *gimnazija*, art *gimnazija*
Source: figures from the Srednješolski izobraževalni programi, 2012b.

We understand the changing trends in education merely as an indicator of the declining potential of academic qualifications, but not as an alternative. In an article on career management paradigm shifts, Philip S. Jarvis compares the key terms of the old and new paradigms. In the field of education, he cites, among other things, changes in terminology: from entitlement (to education, employment, etc.) to personal responsibility (for education, employment, etc.), from occupational titles to skills clusters, from diploma or degree to skills certification, from degree attainment to non-linear perpetual (lifelong) learning, from (institutional) keepers of knowledge to democratisation of knowledge, from career guidance to career development/building/management, etc. (Jarvis, 2003). He goes on to say that while academic and technical qualifications open doors to employment, it is career planning and management skills that largely determine selection, success and advancement (ibid.). The absence of career planning and management content in education programmes can, therefore, have an effect on the exchange value of knowledge in the labour market, and also on the attractiveness or otherwise of an individual educational option. Jarvis makes some fairly radical predictions with regard to education which suggest the future institutionalised and formal forms of education may become less attractive in comparison to non-formal methods of education. If we look at this from a Bourdieuian perspective, this may mean that academic qualifications will lose their value as an institutionalised form of cultural capital. This could further mean that the role of higher education qualifications (compared to secondary school qualifications) will also change in the future regarding access to key positions in society and in terms of the conversion rate between economic and cultural capital.

Conclusion

We have considered the problem of providing a workforce with vocational and technical education in its origin, i.e. with regard to the question of why this type of education is unattractive to young people or, in other words, why young people less frequently choose this type of education. We have examined the situation in the field regarding the orientation of this type of education towards a career through the concept of career guidance. It appears that legislation in the field of the labour market is more influential than legislation in the field of education. A review of implementing documents shows that the range of contents is adequate, but that the amount of time in which these contents are supposed to be provided is not.

An investigation of the theoretical concepts influencing counselling practices in Slovenia reveals that the prevailing concepts are those from the industrial period, which place the individual and his or her capabilities and achievements in the foreground in aptitude tests. The worst represented theoretical concepts are those that understand a career as a process for which the individual needs to be trained by learning career planning and management skills. In Slovenia, then, we may talk about the passive role of the counsellor as a 'facilitator'. For the time being, conditions that would allow the counsellor to take on the active role of educator, trainer and teacher are not present at the systemic level. Learning career planning and management skills would require both inclusion of these contents in the curriculum and personnel with adequate professional training – something currently lacking in Slovenia.

The choice (or not) of vocational and technical education from the point of view of society further confirms the role of the counsellor as 'facilitator', since it shows that this is actually a rational and pragmatic decision at the level of the population. The importance of an academic qualification, as conceived by Bourdieu, is key to understanding the rational nature of this decision. An academic qualification belongs to the individual, and as such, no one can take it away. It conditions legitimate access to key positions in society, while the possibility of giving a monetary value to the academic qualification at the same time enables a rate of conversion between economic and cultural capital. We proceed from the assumption that the basic imperative and driving force of consumer society is consumption itself, for which economic capital is essential. Those practices that enable the individual to enrich his or her economic capital (in this concrete case of the attainment of an academic qualification) are rewarded. The quantity of economic and cultural capital also influences the quantity of social capital. Together with the quantity of symbolic capital, these

four types of capital also represent the amount of power that individual groups possess in the game of society. Consequently, a characteristic of the upper class, as the class with more power in society, is that it is well provided with economic and cultural capital. Lower social classes, by contrast, are characteristically less well provided with economic and cultural capital. It is, however, necessary to realise that this is a generalisation that is unjustified at the level of considering an individual's career path.

A certain amount of caution is nevertheless necessary when treating academic qualifications as the key to success in a career and in society. In Slovenia, the recent statistics on the increasing unemployment rate among young people aged 25–29 with higher education can be seen as an indicator of the weakening convertibility of academic qualifications. The recent decline in interest in enrolment in gimnazije and the simultaneous growth in enrolment in vocational and technical education programmes can indicate the same. We admit the possibility that career planning and management skills have the potential to partially substitute or complement the power of academic qualifications. It is our assumption that given the omission of career planning and management skills from education programmes and a strict adherence to institutionalised and formal forms of education, it is possible to expect non-formal forms of education to become more attractive. This will be the case irrespective of whether this involves general or vocationally specific knowledge.

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